

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

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C O N F I D E N T I A L QUITO 0230

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, EC
SUBJECT: LAST MINUTE REFERENDUM UPDATE

REF: QUITO 0182

1. FORTY-EIGHT HOURS BEFORE THE JANUARY 15 REFERENDUM THE MASS MEDIA HAS BECOME THE SCENE OF A PROPAGANDA BATTLE BETWEEN THOSE FAVORING A VOTE FOR ONE OF THE CONSTITUTIONAL ALTERNATIVES AND THOSE ADVOCATING ANNULING THE BALLOT. IT IS CLEAR THAT THIS, NOT THE COMPETITION BETWEEN THE TWO CONSTITUTIONS, IS WHAT THE REFERENDUM IS REALLY ABOUT.

2. ON JANUARY 10 QUITO'S CHANNEL FOUR BROADCAST A HALF HOUR TAPE OF FORMER PRESIDENT JOSE MARIA VELASCO IBARRA (RECORDED IN BUENOS AIRES) BLASTING THE PRESENT GOVERNMENT AND URGING VOTERS TO NULLIFY THEIR REFERENDUM BALLOTS. (CHANNEL FOUR IS OWNED BY WEALTHY INDUSTRIALIST ANTONIO GRANDA CENTENO WHO HAS BEEN ONE OF THE KEY FIGURES IN THE VOTE NULLIFICATION CAMPAIGN). PERHAPS TO AVOID POSSIBLE GOE CENSORSHIP, THE PROGRAM WAS RUN IN THE EVENING AND GIVEN LITTLE PUBLICITY. VELASCO'S APPEARANCE BETRAYED HIS 84 YEARS AND, THE EMBASSY BELIEVES, WILL HAVE LITTLE INFLUENCE UPON VOTERS.

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3. IN A REFERENDUM RELATED INCIDENT, CHANNEL FOUR NEWS ANCHORMAN DIEGO OQUENDO WAS FIRED BY ANTONIO GRANDA CENTENO JANUARY 11, APPARENTLY FOR SUPPORTING THE REFERENDUM TOO PASSIONATELY AND CRITICIZING THE NULLIFICATION CAMPAIGN TOO SHARPLY IN RECENT TELECASTS. OQUENDO, ECUADOR'S BEST KNOWN AND PROBABLY MOST INFLUENTIAL MEDIA PERSONALITY, HAS BEEN ARRESTED, BEATEN, AND FIRED

BEFORE BECAUSE OF HIS INTELLECTUAL COURAGE. GRANDA, WHO IS ALSO PRESIDENT OF THE ECUADOREAN-AMERICAN CHAMBER OF COMMERCE, HAS DEALT FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION A BLOW BY HIS ACTION AGAINST OQUENDO.

4. AS THE PAST WEEK HAS PROGRESSED, MORE AND MORE PROBLEMS WITH THE MASTER VOTING LISTS HAVE DEVELOPED. SUCH DISTINGUISHED INDIVIDUALS AS FORMER PRESIDENTS GALO PLAZA AND CLEMENTE YEROVI AND QUITO MAYOR SIXTO DURAN-BALLEN HAVE BEEN LEFT OFF THE LISTS. IN GUAYAQUIL THE FOUL-UP REACHED TREMENDOUS PROPORTIONS WHEN ABOUT 40 PERCENT OF THOSE WHO HAD RECEIVED THEIR NEW CEDULAS WERE LEFT OFF THE ROLLS. (THE CIVIL REGISTRAR LATER SAID THAT "ONLY" 20 PERCENT WERE ACTUALLY UNACCOUNTED FOR). FORCES OPPOSED TO THE REFERENDUM HAVE TAKEN ADVANTAGE OF THE ERRORS TO ACCUSE THE GOVERNMENT OF DELIBERATE FRAUD AND TO PUT INTO QUESTION THE LEGITIMACY OF THE REFERENDUM'S RESULTS.

5. BY A SUPREME COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENT DECREE DATED JANUARY 12, THE GOE DETERMINED THAT ALL PEOPLE WHO HAVE NEW CEDULAS CAN VOTE, EVEN IF THEY DO NOT APPEAR ON THE VOTING LISTS. THIS MOVE SHOULD GREATLY DIMINISH THE FORCE OF THE OPPOSITION'S ACCUSATIONS.

6. IN A SPEECH ON JANUARY 12, SUPREME ELECTORAL TRIBUNAL PRESIDENT GALO PLAZA LAUDED ADMIRAL POVEDA'S COMMENTS
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REINFORCING THE GOE'S INTENTION TO CONTINUE WITH RETORNO NOT MATTER WHAT THE RESULTS OF THE REFERENDUM (SEE REFTTEL) AND SAID THAT ALL IS NOW READY FOR THE VOTE. HE LAMENTED, HOWEVER, THAT THE GOE HAD NOT CHOSEN TO ACCEDE TO THE TRIBUNAL'S REQUEST TO HAVE A GENERAL AMNESTY FOR THOSE LABOR AND TEACHER LEADERS STILL IN PRISON.

7. COMMENT: THE GOE DECREE ALLOWING ALL CITIZENS WITH NEW CEDULAS TO VOTE WILL DO A GREAT DEAL TO QUIET SKEPTICISM ABOUT THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE REFERENDUM. IT APPEARS LIKELY THAT THE VOTING SHOULD BE CARRIED THROUGH WITH NO SIGNIFICANT INCIDENT. THE NEXT PROBLEM EXPECTED IS VOTE TABULATION.
BLOOMFIELD

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